

# ABOUT MUSIC

– By *Mariss McTucker*

**Aran Buzzas: 3 7 77**  
**Recorded and mixed by Travis Yost at The Year of the Kangaroo Recording, Missoula, MT; produced by Aran Buzzas, 2013.**

Missoula songwriter and guitarist Aran Buzzas has produced a CD that he worked on for five years, shining up a four-song demo of homemade tunes into a full-length effort. He calls his style “homegrown Montana folky-tonk,” and plays it around town in various venues.

Buzzas has lots of help here from accomplished guest stars who play in other bands, including Caroline Keys, producer Yost, Gibson Hartwell, Grace Decker, Sam Nasset, Andy Dunnigan, Matt Cornette, Nate Biehl, Mike Dunn and Britt Arnesen.

The rockin’ country toe-tapper “The Weather Inside” (written with Mike Dunn), comes out of the chute first – a tune about a man who’s been out all night at the bars again (“the thunder and lightning beats the weather inside”). “Another Man’s Woman” is a slow belt-buckle shiner, with a cool and lazy pedal-steel break by Hartwell, and an almost Hawaiian take on the Dobro by Dunnigan.

In the bluegrass “Cougar Bait,” older women are chasing Buzzas in the bars, and he goes deep into the well with his baritone on “The Night I Saw Willie Play.” “Biggest Fool” is lonesome and moody, brimming with heartache and bitterness; Biehl’s light and tasty mandolin break provides counterpoint.

“Thirteen Days to Payday” has a snappy, shuffly beat as it recounts the struggle of living from paycheck to paycheck, and “Colleen” sports rousing fiddle by Grace Decker. We get a tinge of Irish as well on the CD, as Buzzas sings a slow version of the traditional song, “Whiskey in the Jar.” Travis Yost’s good production wraps up the effort. Visit [www.aranbuzzas.com](http://www.aranbuzzas.com).

**David and Deidre Casey: World Can’t Take It Away**  
**Recorded, mixed, and produced by David Casey, mastered by Lenny Eckhart at Coelacanth Sound, Helena, MT, 2013.**

Prolific Helena songwriter David Casey, of Watercarvers’ Guild fame and oodles of solo CDs, has just put out a folk compendium of songs with his wife, Deidre. It is an unabashed paean to the couple’s devout religious leanings, 20 years in the making.

David plays all the instruments, including bouzouki, banjo and piano, and sings, and Deidre contributes vocals. Seven of the songs are originals, and three are traditional pieces.

“Every Little Thing” opens with a rolling tempo on bouzouki; it’s an uplifting prayer to God where Deidre shows off her complementary harmony vocals. A quieter reprise of the same song closes the album.

“Remade,” written by Deidre, is a slow, pretty song; David adds just a whisper of harmony to good effect. “Quickly Love Is Returning” has a catchy ’60s-sounding melody, with an interesting chord progression on the chorus.

“Nothing Shall Separate Us (from the Lord)” is a slow and simple gospel chant, repetitive and mesmerizing. There’s the folky “This Day God Gives Me,” a traditional hymn; “All Creatures of Our God and King” another traditional prayer, is a light, sweet number; and “More than I Know” has a strident piano intro as Deidre sings the vocal.

David’s wackiness reveals itself on the electronica-fueled title tune, “World Can’t Take It Away.” Space-age sounds and toe-tapping drums propel the syn-copated beat, while Deidre belts out the vocal (“We were made for everlasting joy and the world can’t give it, and the world can’t take it away”). It’s a snappy and modern religious song.

Their voices mesh so well that it’s obvious the Caseys have been singing together for a long time. The songs are a mix of tempos, but all of them reflect the passion of the couple’s religious convictions. It’s a powerful way to express love for a higher power. Visit the Caseys at [www.davidcaseymusic.com](http://www.davidcaseymusic.com).

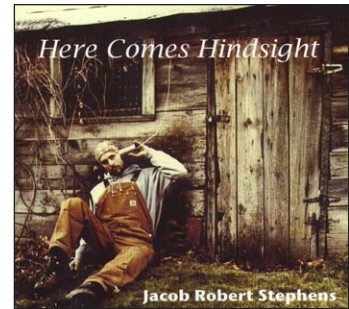
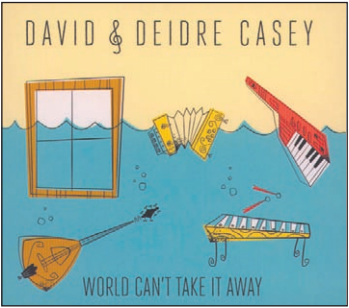
**Jacob Robert Stephens: Here Comes Hindsight**  
**Recorded by Ryan “Shmed” Maynes at Club Shmed Studio in Missoula, and Jesse Haag at The Sonic Distiller in the Yaak, 2012; produced by Jacob Robert Stephens, 2012.**

Missoula singer/songwriter Jacob Stephens, “born and raised in the sticks of rural Montana,” as he says, presents his debut album of 11 country and folk originals that reflect his life here and in Alaska, where he held many jobs before returning home to be near family and play music.

He has published poems in several magazines, and is a multi-instrumentalist to boot, playing guitar, mandolin, sax and harmonica. Stephens invited some musical guests to help fill out the sound, so we hear Maynes on piano, bass and accordion, and Colin McKnight on electric guitar. The list continues with YT Smith, pedal steel; Richard Young, bass; Jesse Haag, drums; John Smith also on drums with harmony vocals; Andrea Harsell, vocals; Brooke Sheridan, vocals; Aaron McPeck, bass and vocals; Annalisa Ingegno, fiddle and vocals; Andrew Kunkel, guitar; and Jeff Burritt, banjo.

A mando-infused intro takes us into “Can’t Slow Down.” Stephens’s sweet, yet raspy baritone is perfect for his story poems.

“Dust Falls” has a moody and slow-rockin’ sound with guitar and mandolin trading instrumental licks. “Dance” is a tender country duet that seems to have wisps of old John Prine or Jerry Jeff Walker.



“Same to Me” is uptempo with lots of cool flat notes, bluegrass guitar kickin’ it behind, and the title tune, “Here Comes Hindsight,” is jazzy and country, with an ear-catching intro. “Ain’t My Baby” lopes along on some nice acoustic guitar and mando, and sports some clean pickin’ from Stephens. (“You said you’d always be my baby ... I’m wonderin’ where you are today ...”).

“Guessing Games,” the finale, is sweetly wistful, with a pretty, melodic chorus (“... ’cause if I only knew what I know now, then I’d always guess the door that you’re behind”). It’s a nice touch to round out the album.

Good, clean production gives the effort a professional sound quality, too. Visit Stephens on Facebook for more information.

**The Whizpops: Science and Wonder**

**Mixed and mastered by Nathan Zavalney at Missoula Soundworks; produced by the Whizpops, 2013.**

Kevin Cashman and his zany Missoula science-mongers have done it again. The elementary teachers’ newest children’s album is chock-full of tunes they wrote about critters and the natural world, following on last year’s *The Adventures of Stretch McCoy*.

The group consists of Cashman, vocals and acoustic guitar; Casey Schaefer, vocals and electric guitar; Daniel Kiely, drums; Steve Kalling, double bass; Cameron Wilson, mandolin and fiddle; and Marge Cates, vocals. Talented guest stars contribute instruments and sound effects as well.

The melodies are upbeat and modern, and the lyrics provide a sonic book of information intended for kids’ consumption.

The wacky “Dinosaurs” comes first. It’s a sort of rap recounting of the long-extinct critter and its eating habits. Who can resist lyrics like “... these dinosaurs were omNIvorous, they were herBIvorous, and carNIvorous ...” while the catchy rhythm is banged out on drums and wah-wah-ed guitar. “Bugs!” gets a snappy, jazzy rendition, and “Penguins” is bluesy with an echoing chorus.

“Adapt,” belted out by Marge Cates, talks about the changes creatures need to make to survive. Cates follows that with a Chuck Berry-esque take on allergies and suffering in “The Sneeze Song”; it sizzles with a rockin’ guitar solo and pounding piano. And there’s a sweetly eerie, Spanish-sounding intro to “Watershed”; in this one the group boogies down to a lesson about how valuable our waters are.

The album is sure to entertain as well as educate the younger audience, without the boring retelling of science older folks remember from school. Visit [www.thewhizpops.com](http://www.thewhizpops.com).

**Jack Walrath, Kelly Roberti and Philip Aaberg: Montana Wild Cats**

**Recorded at Sweetgrass Music in Chester, MT, by Kelly Roberti, Philip Aaberg and Jack Walrath; mixed and mastered by Philip Aaberg, 2013. By Wilbur Rehmann**

*Montana Wild Cats* is more than the title of a new album from three of Montana’s internationally known musicians; it’s a summation, at the top of their game, of the musical gifts of pianist Philip Aaberg, bassist Kelly Roberti and trumpeter Jack Walrath. Curiously, all three came from small Montana towns.

Walrath was raised in Edgar (a tiny town in Carbon County), and attended Berklee School of Music in Boston. He became an arranger and composer with Charles Mingus and played with all the masters of contemporary jazz.

Roberti was born in Malta and raised in Bozeman, and has played on and produced many concerts with a who’s who of jazz greats.

Aaberg was raised in Chester and by the age of 14 was performing with local bands. He left to study music at Harvard University, ended up composing, touring and recording with Elvin Bishop’s blues band, and has since recorded countless albums as a leader and sideman.

The idea for the album began five years ago when Aaberg was at the Emerson Theater in Bozeman to play at a benefit concert for Roberti, who had been injured in a horrific motorcycle accident.

“I was playing through some musical ideas on stage and there was this guy I didn’t recognize, sitting alone out in the theater.” The lone listener introduced himself as Jack Walrath and suggested they do a record together sometime. “I said, ‘I don’t play jazz, but maybe we can do something.’”

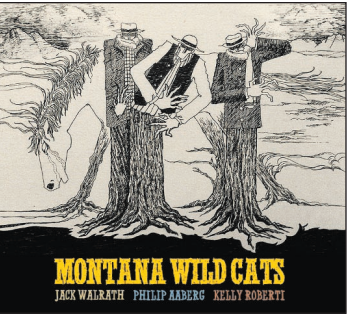
And so it began, this idea that is fully realized in *Montana Wild Cats*, released in June by Aaberg’s Sweetgrass Music. The album was recorded over a series of cold winter days the previous year in Chester, with the thermometer hanging at around minus 20 degrees. All three had agreed ahead of time to bring some original songs and charts to the sessions.

The first song, “Country Slickers” by Walrath, foreshadows the music to come, reaping ideas from a wide swath of American music, from barrelhouse piano to country, rock-a-billy to blues, and jazz to classical. It begins with Walrath’s trumpet and Aaberg’s piano in a plaintive duet, but soon turns into a rollicking, swinging trio tune, ending with a bass cadenza by Roberti that shows why he is so revered by Montana musicians.

“The Final Drum,” written by Roberti, exudes rhythm from this drummerless trio. His bass propels with percussive force and the sounds of trumpet and piano evoke visions of a tough trip through paradise.

Aaberg’s composition, “Blue Coulee,” begins and ends with Roberti’s solo bass. Both Walrath and Aaberg join in with striking harmonies reminiscent of Aaron Copland’s “Fanfare for the Common Man.” Walrath’s trumpet is as clear-toned as any modern jazz or classical player today and consistently builds the tension in this contemplative song, while Aaberg’s piano offers a sensitive reading of the leitmotif melody.

These three wildcats have infused the nine songs on this wonderful album with the essence of Montana, from its small towns and rough-hewn cowboys, to its troubling history of oppressing Native Americans, to its glorious landscape of mountains and plains. Visit [sweetgrassmusic.com](http://sweetgrassmusic.com) for details.



**State of the Arts welcomes CDs**

*State of the Arts* welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or *Lively Times*, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.